

Defining Leadership Pathways

Strategies to cultivate IRWA's future leaders



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Throughout my years on the International Executive Committee, I have emphasized the necessity to attract and retain the young professionals that are coming into the workforce. By embracing our younger leadership group, we can help cultivate their skills, while ensuring the success of those who will become our future leaders. But even beyond those benefits, our young professionals provide valuable insight into what the future leadership of this organization will look like.

Three years ago, I had the pleasure of hosting a session with a group of IRWA Young Professionals in Austin, Texas. We talked about their ideas and new approaches, which all aim to advance our Association's succession planning and leadership development. We also discussed the

challenges for actively identifying and creating development opportunities for IRWA's future leaders.

Turning Ideas into Reality

The feedback from this meeting helped me to form my vision for leadership and put together strategies to influence the future direction of IRWA. The number one challenge that came out of our session in Austin was the lack of employer support for our future leaders. This challenge shaped the concept of being a more "Outward Facing" organization. It is critical that we promote the IRWA to companies and agencies in all of the market segments that we serve. Without these employers seeing the *big picture* and understanding the benefits of involvement in the IRWA, our future leaders will not gain the necessary support.

Another discovery that came out of the session was the need to make leadership development opportunities readily available and recruit Young Professionals that have leadership potential. Over the last three years, we have seen more Young Professionals step into leadership roles than ever before. We have compressed and simplified the pathways to leadership. These young leaders are modernizing our Association, bringing fresh ideas and added perspective.

Last, but certainly not least, we talked about what it takes to be a leader. IRWA is filled with potential leaders and people that have already stepped up to the plate. True leaders all have one supreme quality in common that sets them apart from others: **they are authentic**. Some leaders try to be who they think they ought to be, instead of being who they are. Always remember that the ability to lead will not come from pretending to be someone you are not.

Moving Forward

Be motivated by your mission. Tap into your values and connect with others through your heart, not your style. IRWA is bursting with authentic people. Let's take the next year or two to develop leaders and use this opportunity to turn the IRWA into a *Leadership Incubator*. 🌟



Jerry Colburn with the Young Professionals Group at the 2017 Annual International Education Conference.